

an accidental tourist in my [accident zone](#)

Goodwill Hunting

8 of 8

Since Nirvana-bes hit MTV, thrift stores have been the prop shops of the smug and self-referential, slain by the siren song of that avocado green, scratchy polyester shirt with a wide-ass collar that was cool 35 years ago.

Lately, the recession has turned the thrift store into a go-to destination for more obvious reasons.

When I go, I'm also traveling inward and back down my own timeline. I'm reminiscing, and --yea, I'll say it-- enjoying myself.

I grew up pretty far removed from labels and brands. At a [small evangelical school](#) in Tennessee for 'underprivileged' kids as they called them then (now it's 'displaced'), my parents --a preacher and a piano teacher-- basically volunteered their labor in exchange for room and board for themselves and their two girls.

The school was a magnet for local charity. Bakeries donated surplus bread and unclaimed cakes, the [Elk's Club](#) and local churches threw Christmas parties and bought gifts for all the students (staff kids, too: woohoo!), and every week or so the school's office --a small cottage holding aged desks, typewriters and administrators-- would house a few boxes of cast-offs someone had dropped off.

'Donation' was my major source for clothes from ages 8 to 16, barring underwear, shoes & the occasional good winter coat.

Don't cue the violins. I may sound like Pollyanna, but for me, sorting through crap for the occasional find became a way into the Zone -- that state of concentration you can enter while printing in a darkroom, working at an easel or practicing a guitar.

Hit a rhythm. Duck-duck-duck-duck-GOOSE; crap-crap-crap-crap-BINGO. Train your eye to recognize something with quality material and good lines AND likely to fit you, when it's not marketed on a mannekin and the tag is gone.

This state of mind is waiting for me again in thrift stores -- not so much trendy consignments which pre-filter their wares, but under the fluorescent glare of anything-goes Goodwills, Sal Armies and such.

Sometimes a thing jumps out and I'm like: Score. Oh, hell yeah. But more often it's like tuning into an AM radio frequency.

Rack of jeans. Technique: Pick a section between stops, push hangers all the way to the right (I'm right-handed), one by one slide them left, speed of light, schk-schk-schk-schk-STOP. Inspect, reject, resume, reach next stop, repeat. SCORE.

Here's a jumbled shelf of dishes -- quick scan, slower scan. Veto what's clearly crap, average a second on anything else. Move past... Wait; come back. Something starts humming, maybe a curious little mug. Turn it over; it was hand-painted in Italy.

I admittedly pay more attention to brands and labels now; certain names align with my tastes, and it's interesting when something that 'pops' for me turns out to be a brand I know or respect.

Trolling Goodwill is a different mental space than yard sale hopping. Unlike at a yard sale, no one hovers to answer my questions. Nothing's really worth enough and no one's invested enough in selling this merch to care. The pace can be meditative, where there's room for happening-upon, serendipity.

It's also different than shopping an estate sale; you can imagine a back story but you don't know the fate of any of this crap's former owners, so it's not fraught. (Estate sales are anthropologically fascinating in their own right -- a post for another day.)

[Why 25 miles?](#)

- [Map](#)
- [Contact](#)

user login

Username: *

Password: *

[Request new password](#)

[Americana](#) [bathrooms](#) [Beauty](#)
[death food](#) [Landmarks](#)
[restaurants](#)

As I weather the inherent lulls of freelancing and watch economy headlines do panicked handsprings, that other frequency dominating the national conversation gets louder, too. We can make it on a shoestring again. Can't we?

After trolling for an hour, I left my cell phone in Goodwill day before yesterday and had to go back to pick it up. Is it me, or is it rich that they almost wouldn't release it to me because I couldn't remember what brand it was?...

Bathroom: How would I know? It's not accessible to the public. Boo... Ssss... But you get what you pay for. The Panda Express next door is a fine place to express yourself.

Location
7351 Assateague Dr., Unit 410
Jessup, MD, 20794
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

6 comments

Happy Franksgiving!

A return engagement, to enjoy cornbread stuffing, collard greens and an entertaining companion.

□
□
Location
7395 Cedar Ave
Jessup, MD, 20794
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

7 comments

Give Jimmy Weaver a stone

I'm driving along an industrial back road in Jessup, MD, in the Zone -- the state of hyper-antennaed awareness that takes over when I'm keeping an eye out for things to blog. Peripheral vision is acute. Super powers activate, form of... reality check.

So anyways, I'm approaching an intersection when on the left I catch a flash of headstones blinking through the autumn-thinned stand of trees. I'm turning left just that quickly, into the driveway for a commercial parking lot.

After pulling far enough forward to hide the car in a shadow, I clamber left up a steepish side-hill of leaves and dry brambles to avoid view from the main road (but not detection by squirrels; my footwork is loud as a drunken Yeti's). Classic white-bread act -- pushing boundaries where possible consequences are mild. Naughty, naughty, the trespass of Nancy Drew.

As spotted from the road, leaf-drifts hug two staggered lines of markers with a few stragglers. The stones commemorate several generations -- a patriarch born in England in 1798 is here, as is a man buried in 2005(!).

An old, orphaned cemetery site is one thing, but this one is active? The 2005 stone, like many of them here, is a nice one -- a perfectly credible headstone, one that could have been planted in a 'respected' mainstream cemetery with a better view than a cement plant.

At the opposite end of the next row, something else stands out. A crude wooden stick turns out to be the upright beam of a cross. The transverse beam lies at the foot, next to a stiff and faded U.S. flag.

Jimmy Weaver. According to the upright post, born April 23, 1963. Died April 21, 1990. You joined the world months before Kennedy was assassinated, and left it the year Janet Jackson's "Rhythm Nation" was #1 on Billboard's chart. You almost made it to 27.

And your name has fallen out of its groove onto the ground. I pick it up and put it back. There, that looks better. But very impermanent. No glue, no nails, just set back in.

Maybe this isn't actually -- well, a human's gravesite. A beloved pet? A... 26-year-old beloved pet? With given name and surname? The flag at the foot, left not so long ago, is an unlikely decoration for a pet's site.

What's the story here? What IS this place?

I get home, and the obligatory Google search shows I've found a family cemetery known as the King or Hahn cemetery on Guilford Road.

According to Mary Otto, who wrote 2 stories for the Washington Post in 2001 about the place, the keeper of this plot of roughly 30 marked sites and maybe 20 unmarked ones was 80-year-old Madison Hahn who lived a few blocks down the road and loved to play the ponies at Laurel Park. He of the '05 headstone.

In 2001 when Howard County threatened 30 feet of the cemetery to widen Guilford Road, prompting Mary to cover the story, Mr. Hahn pointed down the row and told her, "This is my mother, my father. These are my grandparents. There's my great-grandfather and great-grandmother. This is where they are going to put me."

Descendants of the site's patriarch William Firmadge King and his wife (this was a piece of an old plantation) came up from Virginia to rally at the county's hearing. They won, turns out -- about 3 months after the family

contested the county's plan it agreed to widen the opposite side of the road into an industrial park. The cemetery's land, and possibly denizens of its unmarked graves (which by some accounts may have included slaves), were left undisturbed. What were their stories?

And now that Mr. Hahn is gone, who's the caretaker?

And... what about Jimmy Weaver? A couple of weeks later, I can't resist stopping back by the site. The crossbar is back on the ground, again snug against the foot of the vertical post. Did the wind knock it back down, or is someone laying it back there to keep it from potentially blowing away altogether?

I can't help replacing it again. Is this desecrating a grave? I hope not; I mean well.

Can Jimmy Weaver get a stone?

Location
10810 Guilford Road
Jessup, MD, 20794
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

tags: [death](#) | [4 comments](#)

Have a seat





Thanks, Drew Prout, for letting me hijack your iPhone...

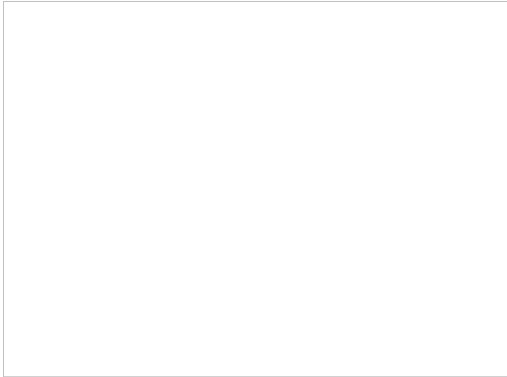
1 comment

Change is good

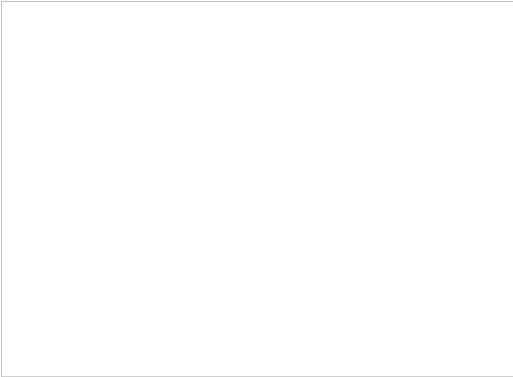
📷📍

What can I say that hasn't been said by so many, and so well? Change IS good, and not just when you find it between the sofa cushions.

A little dusty, a little beat up looking, but at a cement factory on Rt. 1, the flag is flying proud.



Location
8219
Baltimore-
Washington
Blvd.
Jessup, MD,
20794
Within the
[Radius](#)
On [Google](#)
[Maps](#)



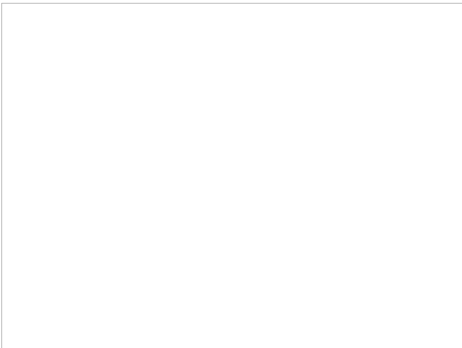
tags: [americana](#), [landmarks](#) | [add a comment](#)

Sweet potato pancakes, Goldilocks grits & capital "S" service

📷📍

If you want some of the best grits north of the Mason-Dixon line, take your fork to Frank's Diner on historic Route 1 North. Says Addi, my game and good-natured dining companion, the coarse cut on these grits lets the true corn flavor shine, and they're neither too watery nor too thick -- just-right "Goldilocks Grits."

On my plate, the sweet potato pancakes were slap-your-momma good. According to Lori Ogden, a waitress who may be THE best server in the Radius (the challenge is ON!), a customer brought the concept back from a recent trip south and Frank promptly added it to the menu. Thanks, Dixie-dabbling customer -- you made my morning.



We just missed a chance to talk to Franklin Davis (eponymous "Frank"). Lori pointed him out as he was pulling away from the restaurant in his truck around 10-ish. The former military man starts each day at the diner around 3:30 a.m., so slackers like us miss his shift.

Things were unusually slow for peak-time Saturday brunch. Customers waiting to be seated typically stack up at the door & out into the vestibule, but Lori says folks were likely shopping for Thanksgiving groceries. Worked for me -- the staff had a little more

time to chat and I got to snap some pics.

The place is a local institution. Frank & his wife recently vacationed together for the first time in years & gave employees the week off. To keep truck drivers from treating the parking lot like a campground (they ding the light poles), Frank hung a chain across the entrance drive -- but the sign explaining the vacation closing was posted up at the diner door. Lori says the outcry from local fans, who drove up to the diner only to find it looking shuttered for good, went on for about 3 or 4 months.

Frank's is close enough to Baltimore that waitresses call customers and each other "hon" and "honey" and it feels right. Many of the wait staff have been there for years, Lori since 2002. Folks who go on to other jobs will often come back to work for Frank again, she says.

Every booth offers a classic countertop jukebox. Annoyingly for some customers and serendipitously for others, when someone plays one it broadcasts to all the booths. It's a big-tent collection, with tunes marketed to Baby Boomers, old-school soul fans, connoisseurs of WWII-era, big band & jazz standards, and those who appreciate Buck Owen's [Waitin' in the Welfare Line](#). ("I got the hungries for your love, and I'm waitin' in the welfare line -- Gimme a handout!")

Things finally got busy so I didn't have time to ask about the giant cakes. This must be [where cakes go when they](#)

[die](#) -- the gargantuan desserts could double as public art. Maybe there's a story there.

Women's bathroom -- a solid goer, heh. Not new, but well-stocked and clean -- in fact, a helpful man was there scrubbing and hopped out to let me go before returning to continue making it sparkle. Both stall doors latch good & tight, and door cracks are reasonably narrow (don't you hate bathroom doors that permit eye contact?). Some of the fluorescent overheads were out which made the place a little dim, but older bathrooms, like some of us, may look our best with a bulb or two unscrewed...

Location
7395 Cedar Ave
Jessup, MD, 20794
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

tags: [bathrooms](#), [restaurants](#) | [7 comments](#)

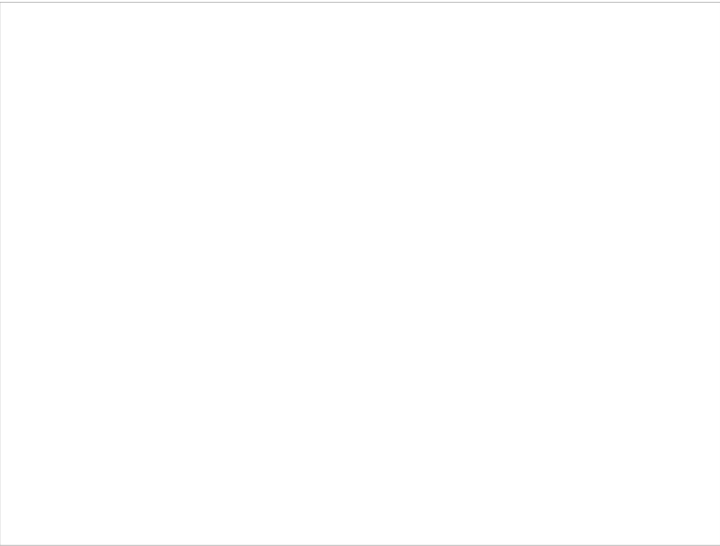
Take a final bough



Hate to see them go.
But hats off -- it's been a real fine show.

Location
4899 Reservoir Rd., NW
Washington, DC, 20007
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

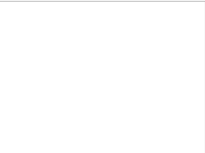
tags: [beauty](#) | [2 comments](#)



From
within or
from behind,
a light shines through us upon things,
and makes
us aware
that we are nothing,
but the light is all.

-Ralph Waldo
Emerson
Location
8325-E Patuxent Range Rd
Jessup , MD, 20794
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)

[add a comment](#)

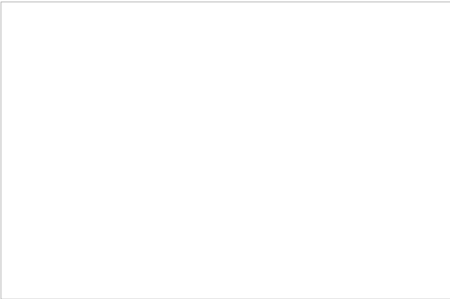


Forsooth, there's a castle on my drive to work.

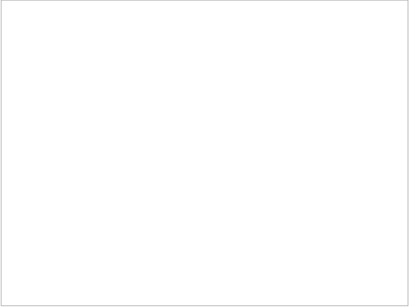
In 1902 (3 years before me poppa was born), the Army Corps of Engineers got grandiose and replicated their own logo in the form of a Castle Gatehouse which functions as a water pumping station on the Georgetown Reservoir, blocks from where I'm working.

It's part of an ambitious and renowned engineering project known as the [Washington Aqueduct](#).

The birds-eye view from out on the reservoir is magnifico (and I do mean birds-eye only; you'd be fished out and jailed if you launched a dinghy to catch the view [out there](#)). Photo on the right was taken by the Corps.



My peasant's-eye view from the street as I drive past daily is a little more prosaic, but still eye-catching ...



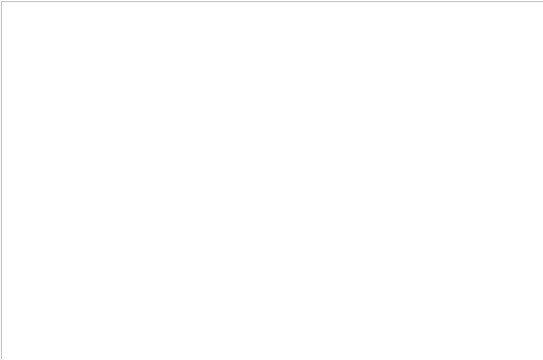
If you're looking to free Rapunzel, or to mine her skanky scalp for extensions, you're SOL -- Punzi has left the building (or is bricked up and fossilized in there)...

... Get your camera out & the fortification becomes downright hostile. Gotta hand it to the Corps of Engineers -- create a novelty building that makes my shutter finger itch, but toss me in the dungeon and put me on the rack if I want just a leetle snapshot... ▢



And does anyone else find it ironic that the logo for our nation's Corps of Engineers is a bit of architecture from the Dark Ages?
I'm just sayin.'

Location
5900 MacArthur Boulevard
Washington, DC, 20016
Within the [Radius](#)
On [Google Maps](#)



Choose Civility

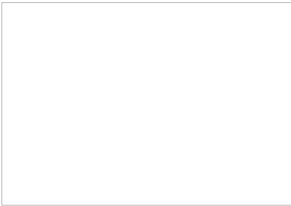


Driving around Howard County, MD for a couple of years I've seen these bumper stickers:

□

Finally Googled it and it's the title of a book written by a guy named Pier Massimo Forni, professor of Italian lit at Johns Hopkins University and founder of the Johns Hopkins Civility Project. A lecture he gave in '06 seeded a public/private/grant-funded [initiative](#) with the mission "to enhance respect, consideration, empathy, and tolerance in Howard County." It's spreading south to Montgomery County, MD and even got written up in the [Times Online](#) in the UK.

Gotta love it -- the tone is arch and academic, aching with good intention. Reminds me of the earnest [Keep America Beautiful](#) public service ads of yore. Give that SUV the finger and the Indian cries.



But is it futile, eau de Don Quixote, tilting at windmills? I feel protective, like Howard County is a sweet old bat going 45, hands at 10 and 2, eyes and forehead just cresting the dash...

Apparently [others think so](#), too.

[2 comments](#)